



Partnering With Community-Based Organizations to Improve Cardiovascular Health Among African Americans

Public Health Problem

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Georgia, accounting for more than 23,000 deaths, or nearly 40% of all deaths in 1997. The two most common forms of CVD, heart attack and stroke, account for more deaths in every Georgia county than any other cause of death and is a major cause of costly hospitalization and disability.

Evidence That Prevention Works

Research has demonstrated that modifying health-related behaviors that contribute markedly to CVD (i.e., tobacco use, lack of physical activity, and poor eating habits) is critical both to preventing and controlling the disease.

Program Example

With CDC support, the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness is enhancing efforts to reduce heart disease and stroke among diverse populations, including African Americans. The REACH for Wellness program works with its coalition partners to develop intervention strategies to improve cardiovascular health among African Americans residing in the Atlanta Empowerment Zone (AEZ). Designated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1994, the AEZ consists of 30 neighborhoods occupying 9.29 square miles in central Fulton County. Ninety percent of the AEZ population is African American, and 76% of the population is made up of female-headed households with incomes below the poverty level, with a median household income of \$8,953. Through this coalition effort, partners hold weekly aerobics classes and work with supermarkets and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to conduct grocery store surveys, classes, and demonstrations. A key partner in the coalition recruited churches, beauty salons, and barbershops to establish cardiovascular wellness centers in the community and has trained over 80 volunteers to conduct blood pressure monitoring.

Implications

This community-based approach can extend lifesaving prevention programs and health services across cultures to communities that would not likely be reached by traditional means. The state will continue to spearhead the country's efforts to eliminate health disparities by applying lessons learned from the REACH 2010 projects in communities across Georgia. This program demonstrates the importance of close collaboration with community members and creative partnerships with public and private organizations to reach every community member with important health messages and services.

Contact Information

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